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# In Focus: Seniors looking to stay engaged and for commitment to home care in campaign

*For the parties, it's easy to explain why seniors matter. People over age 65 make up about 15 per cent of Saskatchewan's population — and they vote.*

Arthur White-Crummey

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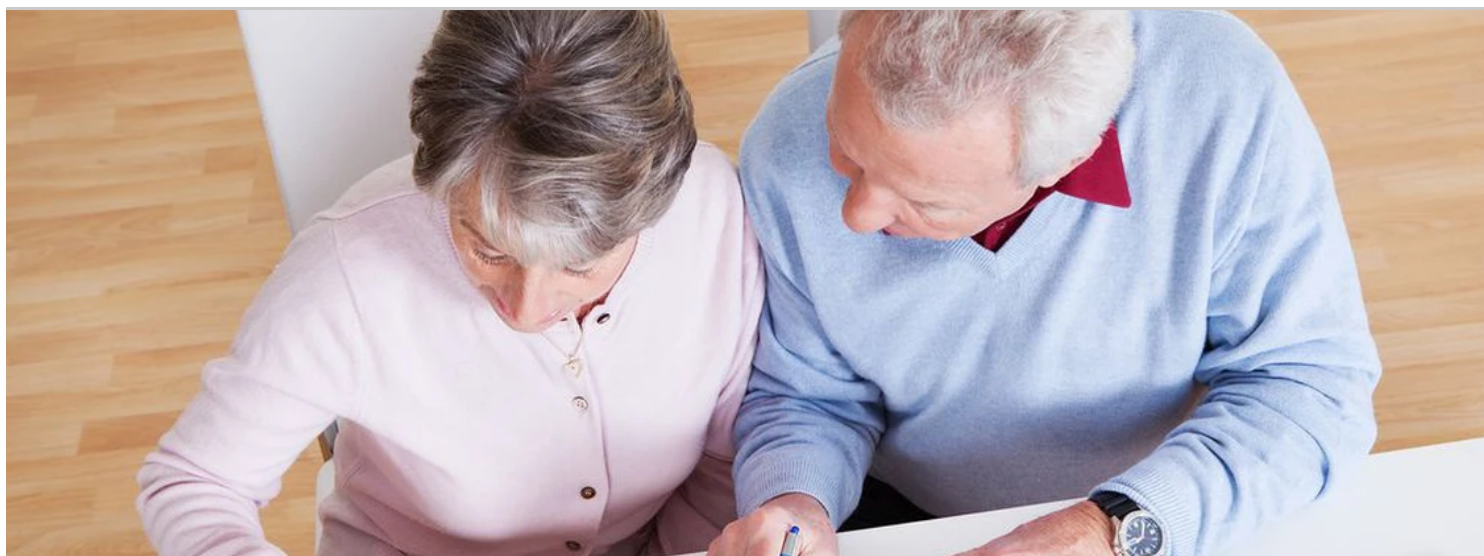
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Saskatchewan political parties will be sure to make promises that will benefit seniors during the provincial election campaign.  
PHOTO BY ANDREYPOPOV /Getty Images/iStockphoto

Saskatchewan voters are to go to the polls on Oct. 26 for a provincial election. Until that day, you'll be hearing a numbers of promises from party leaders and candidates across the province. The Regina Leader-Post and Saskatoon StarPhoenix are taking a look at some of the issues that will be prominent on the campaign trail and breaking down what the parties are saying and what might play into how you vote.

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*Today: Seniors issues*



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## Why does it matter?

For the parties, it's easy to explain why seniors matter. People over age 65 make up about 15 per cent of Saskatchewan's population — and they vote. There's no data available at the provincial level, but Canadians aged 65 to 74 voted at a rate of 85 per cent in the 2019 federal election, eight points above the average.

And government matters for seniors. They're the heaviest users of health services, the single biggest line item in the government budget at roughly \$6 billion. Debates over surgical wait times, the quality of home care or standards in long-term care are matters of life and death. On the other hand, since many live on fixed incomes, increases in the cost of living can bite harder. A tax hike or a new user fee can make a big difference in their lives.

## What are seniors looking for?

The province's umbrella seniors' organization, the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM), wants to hear plans from each of the parties to keep older people "actively engaged in their communities."

That goes well beyond debating long-term care spending and hospital care. Linda Anderson, 77 years old and the SSM's communications co-ordinator, said seniors will be listening to proposals on transportation, affordability and, unavoidably, COVID-19.

But the first issue on Anderson's mind is expanded home care. She said the current system is too focussed on medical needs alone. If the parties really want to help older people stay in their homes, they should consider rolling out a home care program that includes housekeeping and even minor repairs. It's cheaper than long-term or hospital care, after all.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

When that isn't an option, Anderson wants to make sure that long-term care "isn't simply warehousing older people."

She also wants a solution on rural transportation for seniors who can't drive, and a seniors' advocate on the model of B.C.

The government's handling of the pandemic, and what the parties propose for the ongoing battle against the coronavirus, will no doubt be front of mind for most voters. But for seniors, who are much more likely to face death or serious illness from COVID-19, that debate should be even more pressing.

"I think that'll be right up near the top for most older adults," said Anderson. "We know that we're more vulnerable."

## What have the parties said so far?

The Saskatchewan NDP has already put out a handful of proposals that seem directed to voters like Anderson. Its leader, Ryan Meili, wants to create "the best home care system in Canada," according to his

## People First Recovery Plan released in June.

He has also committed to bringing back the Saskatchewan Transportation Company that was scrapped in the 2017-18 budget.

The NDP has also called for stronger efforts to reduce surgical wait times and accused the government of understaffing throughout the health care system, including in long-term care. It has pointed to an SHA document, called the CEO tour report, that repeatedly draws attention to staffing pressures.

But the Saskatchewan Party government has defended itself by pointing to its record, notably the 700 additional front-line staff it has brought on since 2007. More recently, this June, it put millions toward renovating 52 long-term care homes and building or expanding two more, in Grenfell and La Ronge.

It also created a minister responsible for seniors.

The Saskatchewan Party is also eager to go after the NDP for cuts during its last time in government. “They closed long-term care facilities,” Premier Scott Moe said in July.

Neither the Greens nor the Saskatchewan Liberals have yet released specific seniors’ proposals. The Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan has weighed in on the euthanasia debate, calling for the end of Medical Assistance in Dying and a National Palliative Care strategy instead.

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- 1 cup whole eggs
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 cup whole eggs
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- 1 cup whole eggs
- 1 cup whole milk

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